

The Salt Bond

Chap. VII

574 Faleh bin 'Aamir, a Mutairi of the Mu'aha branch of the 'Iwa,
628 whom I have known for several years and with whom I have spent many a pleasant evening in the desert, has from time to time told me many stories relating to Arab hospitality. Among other things, he detailed the duty of guests towards their host which I recorded in my notes on 7th January, 1935.

Not only, said he, is there a binding duty of the host towards his guest, but such guest, so long as his host's salt (*milaf*) is in his stomach (*f lamina*)—which is always assumed to be three days and three nights—is responsible that no harm comes to the host from the guest's tribe. For example, A was the host of B, who quite casually and as an ordinary traveller, had stopped at A's tent and spent the night (*sawwala andla*). Next day B left A's tent (second day) and went his way. On the third day A's tent was attacked by raiders from B's tribe, and five camels and one mare were carried off. A then had a rightful claim against B and was able through B's intervention to recover his lost camels and mare.

In practice A would follow B to his tribe, however far away, and would lay his claim before him, or if B's tribe were not on a friendly footing with A's tribe, A would send a neutral messenger to B, and demand satisfaction.

Not only would B be in honour bound to make complete restitution, but he would have the whole of his tribe behind him if it were necessary to coerce the raiders who had harmed A's camp and stolen the camels. On top of the restitution to A, "honour" money or "honour" camels, would have to be paid to B. That is, the raiders would have to give an extra camel or two to B as compensation for having, so to speak, broken the salt bond between the two men.

SANCTITY OF WOMEN

- 562 In the desert the position of women is a far freer and happier one
● 567 (if we except the hard life and privation that is their lot), than that
566 of their Arab sisters of the town. It is true that they are frequently divorced. Such divorces, however, are not over-serious. Perhaps there is incompatibility of temper, or perhaps the wife has failed to serve up a tasty dinner for her husband and lord. It matters little.

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If she is pretty, attractive and the daughter of So-and-So, she will easily find a dozen other men ready to marry her. 562 587 ●

As for her children: she retains the small ones till they reach the age of eight, and then hands them over to their father's care, but they are never far from her, and are allowed to come and see her as often as they like. Nay, if she is a clever girl she will keep on quite friendly terms with her former husband, and call and see his new wife regularly. That is quite common practice. 586

Where the Badawin housewife has distinctive rights, is in the management of the tent; she is *um al 'ayal* (mother of the family) as well as *rayat al hais*. She holds the honour and good name of her husband in the hollow of her hand. Upon her falls the duty of providing for the guest, of cooking choice and tasty dishes, of turning out good *lahes*, and generally bringing the good name of her husband into prominence among his fellow Arabs. 562 462

The mistress of the house never sees or mixes with stranger guests, but she knows all that is going on, for only a curtain partition separates the women's from the guest's quarters. 642 674

The personal name of the lady of the house is never mentioned by the guest, or even by the host's men friends, she is *Um al 'Ayyl* or *Rayat al Bair* only. Should a friend wish to ask after a man's wife, he will merely say to the husband, *Kaif hal illi sawrak?* or *Salamun um al 'ayal?* ("How is she who is behind you?" or "How is the mother of the children?"). Unpleasant badinage is taboo.

Even more carefully guarded and shielded are a man's marriageable daughters. They are never seen at all, except by those on very intimate terms.

Jokes about a man's getting married, and so forth, are quite common, and the young Lothario about to get spliced is always the butt of his companions, but never is the woman's name brought into this form of rough chaff. That would be *'ail* (a shameful thing). 562 522

The sanctity of a woman and her good name is more immediately apparent in cases of war or hostilities between two tribes. 726

She it is who encourages her menfolk to go forth and fight bravely for her and come back triumphant. She it is, if the tribe has to be rallied, who uncovers her face, lets down her hair, and mounts the *malak* of the tribe wildly to encourage the young and old men to

Proposal and Divorce

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not done. He must approach her through her father. He can and⁵⁸⁴
does, however, propose in person to a widow or a divorced^[587]
woman.

After marriage the Badawin takes his bride to the tent he has pre-⁵⁸⁵
viously pitched for her, close to that of her father, and consummation
takes place. Many are the curious eyes and ears which are concen-
trated on the bridal tent.

As with us, those chiefly interested in the marriage ceremony are
the other women of the camp.

Slaves marrying go through the same ceremonies as the freeborn^[567]
the master and mistress of the slave acting the part of the parents of
the bridegroom: and as much interest is evinced in the marriage of one
of their slaves as in that of one of the family.

The Badawin's love for cohabitation is well known, and as I have⁷³¹
said elsewhere, sex is to him the supreme joy of life. Both bride and
bridegroom indulge riotously in this honeymoon period. So wildly
passionate is their love-making that I have known of a man breaking
two of his wife's ribs on the first night of their marriage. As soon as⁸⁴²
the wife finds herself with child, she lets the other women know
about it, and it becomes the occasion for much rejoicing. She con-
tinues cohabiting with her husband as a matter of course till just
before the baby's birth.

DIVORCE

Divorce procedure is simplicity itself. The man need only say to⁵⁸⁶
his wife before witnesses that he does not want her any more. He
has to make the statement three times for it to be valid: *Ma arid ik,*
ma arid ik, ma arid ik. No disgrace attaches to the woman, who
takes the matter quite philosophically, and proceeds to look for
another husband.

If the man divorces the woman, she keeps the *jaldq* he has given
her, which is sufficient provision for her for a considerable time, or
till she gets a second husband. It must not be forgotten that she has
nearly always invested her *jaldq* in buying a camel or some sheep and
has thus become an owner of livestock.

The point to emphasise is that no disgrace whatsoever clings to⁵⁸⁷
divorce, and if the girl is fair, or was the wife of a big shaykh, there is

Re-marriage

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- 587 keen competition among the other young men to marry her. This especially is the case if the girl has character and is famed among men.

Al Jani, sister of Khalid al Hithlain (Zib Sahman), paramount Shaikh of the 'Ajman in 1935, is a case in point. She was good-looking, young and very desirable, but she above all had a will of her own, and was a veritable "Shaikhah". She thought nothing of giving away a camel to one of her poorer 'Ajman brethren who needed one, and kept open *maḍaf* when her brother was away. She married the following well-known personages in the order mentioned, and he it noted she was three times the wife of His Majesty 'Abdul 'Aziz al Sa'ud, who on each occasion got her then husband to divorce her in return for a handsome camel present, on the excuse that *Khatiri ma tab min her* (I have not got over my love for her):

- (1) 'Abdul 'Aziz al Sa'ud (King).
- (2) Sa'ud al Arafa al Sa'ud (King's brother-in-law).
- (3) 'Abdul 'Aziz al Sa'ud (King).
- (4) Rakan al Hithlain, son of Dhimlan al Hithlain ('Ajman).
- (5) 'Abdul 'Aziz al Sa'ud (King).
- (6) Bandar al Dawsah, paramount Shaikh of Muzair 1939.
- (7) Muslag al Jaba'a, a Shaikh of Muzair.

She had a child by each husband except al Hithlain.

The system means that pretty nearly every woman, by the time she is thirty years old, has had two or three husbands, some as many as seven or eight. Hence there is no spinsterhood among Badawin, and every woman at one time or another experiences the joys of married life. Thus there is no unmarried woman problem, and no prostitution. Adultery or running away with a lover is extremely rare, and ends usually in the death of the woman at the hands of relatives.

- 586 Should a wife get angry (*ṭaḥr* 'alḥaw) with her husband, she goes back to her parents and refuses to return to him. He perforce has then to divorce* her; in this case the woman returns her *jaddi*. This is the woman's method of getting rid of a husband who is not wanted; the West could profitably learn a lesson from the Badawin method of marriage and divorce.

If a wife finds she loves another man and no longer desires her

* Unless he can persuade her to return by giving her a *khaw* or *ḥaw* present of clothes, a camel, sheep or the like.

Bridal Outfit

Muntafiq

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over the four feet, etc. Only at dawn do these women "spoil-sports" withdraw to the outer room, after locking the bride and bridegroom up in one stifling room together. Later, when the bridegroom craves to come out, they open the door and go in and wash the bride all over, change her clothes, and redress her for a fresh visit of the bridegroom. This takes place a couple of hours after (see Hamda's sister's marriage in Kuwait on 4th July, 1935). K 585

Amsha, the pretty married daughter of Ibrahim al Muzaiyin of Riyadh, told me on 12th July, 1935, that the Arabs had a saying that: "A woman was like a *jirba* (leather bag) of dates; when full, she was useful in more ways than one, when empty she was of no further use and could be thrown away", referring to the uselessness of a woman who could no longer bear children. In throwing her away the husband casually said, *hafakti wa nafakti*, i.e. "You can go, but I keep any children you have had".* B 342

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS AMONG IRAQ TRIBES

A bride's *trousseau* consists entirely of household effects: cooking utensils, pillows, cushions, blankets, *qars*, *laidj*, bridal-bed and, of course, new clothing for herself. The bride never brings such things as a horse or mare to her husband, though I have heard Europeans say she does. Her purchase money is usually sent to her father by the prospective bridegroom a fortnight or month before the marriage. Among the Iraq tribes this money is almost invariably handed over to the daughter, with an additional sum from the father himself. Aided, of course, by her mother and female relatives, the daughter then converts the money into jewellery. The cost of an Iraq tribal girl is usually in the vicinity of Rs.200; the price of a shaikh's daughter varies, but does not as a rule run to more than Rs.1,000. As in the desert, a man if he possibly can always marries his cousin. She is supposed to be his from the day she is born. The Sa'adun Shaikhs of the Muntafiq (Euphrates) often keep their female cousins single till the day of their death, in order to keep property in the family. It is an unpleasant habit, and is widely condemned by other Arabs. B 575

* A woman who has been divorced may not re-marry till after three lunar months — or, as the Bedouins put it, *Min la'ul shahid laharar wa shahid gharar*. This is to insure that she is not with child by the man who divorced her. B 577

A Father's Rights

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844 for the purpose. The mother lived, and her father personally thanked me for lending the mare and saving his daughter. In the absence of my mare a similar request for the loan of my horse was made (25th August, 1937). Unfortunately in this case the patient died.

955 The rights of a Badawin father over his children are absolute; the
386 mother has practically no rights. Should a man divorce his wife, the sons usually go with the father and the girls with the mother. Should the children be infants, the mother keeps them until they can fend for themselves, and then the father comes and takes them away. (The age in the case of boys is eight.) This removal of a son by his father is the cause of much heartrending grief at times, but is universally practised.

The children thus taken away from their mother live with their father and are brought up by their stepmother. They have the right of visiting their own mother's tent at stated intervals, usually once a week. In a tribe camped together the hardship is not great, but when a man has married a woman from another tribe, the rule causes much unhappiness, as the woman usually goes back to her people, who may be several hundreds of miles away; and she rarely sees her children again.

955 Among the Al Sa'ud, Al Subah, etc., it is a common custom to have
643 as wives two or three Badawin ladies at a time, who always remain camped with their own people. When a child is born to one of these desert-dwelling wives it is usually taken right away and brought up in the shaikh's household in Kuwait or Riyadh. It is not considered fitting that the offspring of one of the ruling family, even if the mother is of noble tribal birth, should be left to grow up in tribal surroundings.

587 This feeling is particularly strong if the child is a boy.* As a matter of fact, in such alliances the wife is early divorced and pensioned off with a handsome present. This marrying of tribal girls in addition to the "Queen", who is always a lady of the ruling family, is a normal and accepted practice among the ruling classes in Arabia. It is a method of showing honour to a tribe, and brings useful alliances in its train. Tribal shaikhs, on the other hand, usually content themselves with one wife.

* This does not run counter to the up-bringing custom among the nobility of Arabia of sending their sons into the desert to be brought up by the Bedawin in order that they may acquire hardihood.

CHAPTER XIII

Morality

- 517 There is no immorality, as we know it, among the desert tribes. There is, of course, plenty of marrying and giving in marriage, and as I have said, divorce is so easy that a woman often has six or seven husbands in her lifetime, and a man always as many wives as he can afford, provided he confines himself to four at a time. Prostitutes are 548 unknown among the Badawin, and adultery is punishable with death. 137 Friendships between men and women, on the other hand, exist, and are recognised, especially if the parties are of the same tribe and are related, for example my friend Shaikh Thurwairan Abu Sifra of the Mu'ala section of the Mutair, was a friend of Muthi, wife of Faleh bin 612 'A'amir, also of the Mu'ala. Every Badawin, of course, is aware that 369 immorality exists in the big towns, and this is one of the main reasons 548 why he despises the townsman.

Unfortunately a Badawin man up from the distant desert sometimes finds his way to the prostitute quarters when he visits towns [64] such as Mecca and Medina, Jiddah, and Kuwait. This has resulted in the spread of syphilis and venereal disease among the tribes.

In Wahhabi-land proper (i.e. Sa'udi Arabia, excluding the Hijaz), no prostitute is tolerated even in the towns, let alone among the tribes, but I am told that there is nevertheless a good deal of clandestine immorality.

- 731 It is curious but true that if you discuss the question of morals with 612 well-informed Najd Badawin, they will always tell you that certain great shaikhly families of the desert, especially in the north, have always had rather loose morals, while certain others stood out for their good morals and generally high tone. For instance, the well-known shaikhly house of Al Sha'alan (Ruwala) as well as that of the Hawazin, Bani Sakhr (both Trans-Jordan), and Shammar Jarha (Iraq), are all said to be pretty lax where women are concerned, and conversely Al Hadhal (Amara), the Dunhan (Mutair) and the Hamidla (Utaiba)